Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

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Rural Families in Bangladesh Spring into Diet Diversification

SPRING Project

Women observe proper planting techniques at a farmer field school demonstration plot.

Manjila Khatun, a Bangladeshi mother, wanted to diversify and strengthen her family's diet by adding more animal-source food. Because of what she learned at a **farmer nutrition school**, one of a number of sessions for women who are pregnant or lactating and whose children haven't yet reached the age of 2, she is now more aware of nutrition and has been able to make important changes to her family's diet. The schools are led by USAID's Strengthening Partnerships, Results, and Innovations in Nutrition Globally project (SPRING), which works in Feed the Future's target areas in two southern divisions of Bangladesh – Barisal and Khulna.

Since 2012, this USAID program has worked with more than 125,000 pregnant and lactating women and their families in Bangladesh to address critical issues around nutrition and hygiene, with a focus on the first 1,000 days between pregnancy and a child's second birthday. Farmer nutrition school sessions use the principles of **nutrition and hygiene** as a platform to teach improved production practices and encourage rural families to diversify their diets. Women learn about the significance of nutrition and hygiene practices in households, as well as how to improve horticulture practices, better raise chickens, and cultivate fish to increase the amount of nutritious food available to their families.

Thanks to what she learned in farmer nutrition school sessions, Khatun adopted better poultry-rearing techniques such as regular vaccinations, improved hatching methods, separating chicks from their mothers, and biosecurity to prevent the spread of disease-causing organisms in her flocks. As a result, the number of her chickens' egg-laying cycles increased to five or six per year, and the level of the hens' egg production went up. Khatun now has enough eggs to regularly feed to her young children, which are an efficient way to ensure they get important nutrients like protein, iron, and a range of vitamins.

Fish are another animal-source food that these schools promote and are especially important for pregnant and lactating women and young children. They promote nutrient-dense small indigenous species of fish, since these are easy to keep even in a small body of water, and contain an array of micronutrients.

Nazma Begum, like other participants, learned about pond preparation, stocking fish, fish feed production, and regular fish harvesting from these sessions. She now feeds highly-nutritious fish to her family, including her young children, helping improve and diversify their diet.

Fakirhat, a member of the farmer nutrition school in Khulna, shows off sweet potatoes grown using her vine cuttings.

The farmer nutrition schools also promote production and consumption of nutrient-rich fruits and vegetables such as papaya, spinach, and a variety of gourds. The women learn to prepare garden beds, pits, and other techniques to increase vegetable and fruit production. They also learn about a range of indigenous and very familiar vegetables and fruits that are not only easy to grow, but are packed with essential vitamins and nutrients.

Rich in vitamin A, the orange-fleshed sweet potato is an optimal food choice for pregnant and lactating women and for women with children under 2. It is a local, cost-effective way to prevent night-blindness, stunting and malnutrition among children and adults.

"Komla misti alu (orange-fleshed sweet potato) is the tastiest of all nutritious food I have grown in my backyard," said Nilufa Yasmin, a participant. "My child used to eat unhealthy snacks, but now I give him boiled komla mistu alu. He really enjoys it!"

Among the many other varieties that the project promotes, SPRING distributed vines of this nutritious crop to nearly 12,000 farmer nutrition school participants in over the past year, making it accessible to many poor women farmers for the first time. Farmer nutrition school participants distributed vine cuttings to an additional 8,500 nearby farmers, and because this crop is nutritious and can be cooked in many ways, growing it quickly became popular.

Through efforts such as its farmer nutrition schools in Bangladesh, Feed the Future is helping countries and communities understand the connections between agriculture and good nutrition and how their work to produce food and agricultural products impacts the nutrition, health and well-being of their families.

*Read more about SPRING's **farmer nutrition schools** and explore SPRING's **Five Ways to Improve Nutrition through Agriculture** infographic, which explains more about the impact of agriculture on nutrition.*